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Jungle Dilemma

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Barry Goldwater was hooted from coast to coast when he declared that victory in Vietnam would depend on our successful destruction of supply lines from North Vietnam. He was accused of proposing to "defoliate" the jungles with radioactive materials.

If we disregard the political attacks and examine the problem itself, we may conclude that there can be no victory for us in Vietnam unless we do cut off their supplies, by whatever method that is practical.

Every day the evidence piles high that we can't win a jungle war with the Communists. We can't fight that way successfully, and the enemy can.

Willard Matthias, of the Central Intelligence Agency, said Monday: "There is serious doubt that victory can be won. At best, a prolonged stalemate might be achieved."

And from Saigon Monday came new reports of intensified reaction against the U.S.A. and local government by mobs of students, proving the inability of the South Vietnamese to show a solid front.

An Associated Press dispatch from Saigon dramatically illustrates our inferiority in this kind of war: "More than 1,000 Vietnamese troops moved into the Black Virgin Mountain territory, a backyard for the Viet Cong, and got lost!"

One group lost contact with the others for an entire day in staggering blindly through jungle thickets.

"The Viet Cong," said an American adviser, "could pick us off like flies" if they could find the wandering soldiers. Patrolling troops ran upon the site where government soldiers were recently ambushed. There were 75 fresh graves.

"It may take something like a miracle before we can get at the enemy in there, and 'hurt him,' the American adviser continued.

This jungle, out of which Viet Cong Communists emerge to strike unexpectedly, is only 60 miles from Saigon.

It seems obvious that even a large scale American land operation would be hopelessly inadequate to defeat this kind of elusive enemy.

We can continue to lose this war, month by month, or take one of two alternatives: bomb out supply bases on the Vietnam borders, and risk Red China's retaliation, or, secondly, accept neutrality, which would also bring the Red Chinese in, but with less shooting.

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We are so inextricably involved in Vietnam and other Southeast Asian struggles that withdrawal, at best, can only be a slow process. But it should be a warning against getting involved similarly in Africa. Signs that we might do just that come from the Congo, where we seem to be taking over what the United Nations failed to accomplish.

Senator Mike Mansfield, Democratic majority leader, issued a statement Saturday warning us against our cultivating this tendency. "The history of Africa," he declared, "is one of European involvement. It would be most unfortunate if we were drawn into the internecine warfare of the Congolese."

And he added, pointedly and wisely, "We must resist the urge to try to solve every problem wherever it crops out."